

Hammer, Thomas: *Collaborative regional governance as the foundation of the Swiss park model?*

Oral presentation, EUROPARC Conference “We Are Parks!”, 19 October 2016, Parc Jura Vaudois, Le Sentier/VD

Is *collaborative regional governance* the basis of the Swiss park model? – Is *collaborative regional governance* the key factor for the successful institutionalization of relatively many parks in Switzerland in such a short time?

Our assumption is the following: two principles have to be met in order to foster and successfully establish a park in Switzerland:

1. The first important principle of the institutional frame conditions is bound to the Swiss park ordinance, namely that all the municipalities involved, and in consequence the majority of the population in each municipality, have resp. has to agree on the park project. The project of a park has to find the acceptance not only of the actors and the actively involved persons, but of the majority of the population that will become part of the park. It is thus very important to include all possible actors and the whole population early by informing them consequently on the plans, the effects and the possible chances that such a project can uncloze for a whole region. Since the park projects have to be confirmed and accepted in a municipality vote by the population, the project group has to be able to build up a minimal acceptance of the project in an area before the population's vote. Otherwise, the project will fail; a fate that so far ended several projects of parks in Switzerland.
2. The second very important principle is that the responsibility for the park is borne by a regional authority and not by the canton or the confederation. The park municipalities must be represented on the park authority. The initiative for founding a park must be bottom-up in nature: the park authority has to persuade the higher administrative level. The confederation only provides financial aid if the canton, the municipalities affected, and any possible third parties participate jointly in the funding of the park. The park label can then be used to raise awareness of the park.

The confederation awards the label *park of national significance* and grants support and financial aid only when relatively strict conditions are met.

1. The first of these is that the park itself provides proof of the great natural and landscape assets, that it has outstanding nature and landscape qualities.
2. The second requirement is the spatial safeguarding of the park. The park authority has to show that the outstanding nature and landscape qualities are protected by legally valid ordinances, and that the park objectives are integrated in the regional and cantonal planning.
3. The third condition is the establishment of a viable park authority. The park authority is in charge of and responsible for the running of the park, concerning organization, finance, quality, and ensure the participation of all actors and the population.
4. And forth: The park authority, in which the municipalities affected have to be represented, are required to draw up a ten-year charter to demonstrate how they intend to achieve the given objectives. After ten years the park charter can be renewed. In addition, the participating municipalities and the park authority are to agree a park contract and a management plan that records the strategic objectives of the park, the activities the park should undertake, and how the municipalities will support the park authority. Both, park contract and management plan, must get the agreement of the population of all the participating municipalities through a vote.

An important question is: why does the population want to live in a park? – Factors that encouraged the establishment of new parks were related to the increasingly difficult economic conditions that rendered new “business models” for rural areas and mountainous regions necessary. According to the legal conditions, the parks mainly strengthen the ecological dimension of sustainable development, but also open social and economic opportunities for the population. Thereby, the UNESCO Biosphere Entlebuch as the first regional park in Switzerland quickly attracted great national and international attention with its innovative projects, and acted as a model which encouraged other regions.

The crucial point in putting up a park is therefore the creation of acceptance among the population and to convince the local actors to get involved actively in the park project. To be successful in the establishment of a park in Switzerland, the population needs to understand possible positive impact which a park might take on their life.

A nature park can provide and foster, for example:

- Visions for the future for the region and individuals
- Environmental education promotion
- Services focused on recreation and nature-based tourism
- Sustainable forms of use in agriculture and forestry
- Strengthening sustainable economic activities and promoting the marketing of local products and services, and
- Sustainable use of resources and the promotion of environmental friendly technologies

All these dimensions create perspectives for young and innovative people, job opportunities, recreational opportunities for local people and enhance innovation and tourism. They motivate younger people to stay and make their living in a marginal region.

The question is now, how to promote acceptance and actor involvement? – In our analysis we found out, that the Swiss park model is based on a combination of several instruments for promoting acceptance and actor involvement.

Moreover, we find a successful interaction of instruments in the following categories of instruments:

- Requirements and prohibitions
- Market economy instruments
- Service and infrastructure instruments
- Agreements, as well as
- Communication and diffusion instruments

Requirements and prohibitions: As discussed, significant natural and landscape assets must be legally protected, for instance by the use of nature or landscape conservation areas, and the terms of protection and use must be stipulated in the spatial planning of the municipalities, regions, and cantons. Many Swiss rural regions have at their disposal legally protected nature and landscape conservation areas characterized by the natural and landscape qualities necessary for an area to be awarded park status.

Market economy instruments: The financial incentive systems are particularly important in this category. The parks receive relevant financial aid from the confederation and from the cantons. A role is also played by financial compensation for utilization restrictions, ecological management, and other measures benefitting nature and the landscape. In Switzerland such activities for the benefit of the public are usually well compensated. This motivates resource users to participate in projects such as those that benefit ecological connectivity and enhance the cultural landscape. Park managements tend also to encourage such projects as they ultimately generate additional income in the park.

Service and infrastructure instruments: The institutional framework requires for example a management body. This is subordinate to the park authority and accordingly to the municipalities, but is funded also by the confederation and the canton. The park management is therefore primarily a service agency of the municipalities themselves, providing services for the various actors in the park and for the population. An important task for the park management is to acquire additional third-party funding from programs and foundations with which to implement park projects.

Agreements: Many tools play an important role in this category of instruments. A park is essentially based on a performance agreement between different actors. The **park label** awarded by the confederation thus symbolizes the agreement between the confederation and the park authority vis-à-vis the public and the population. It makes it possible for the park area to market itself and to participate in regional competition. Similarly, an incentive system for consumers and producers is created by the **product label** awarded by the park authority to goods and services. The monitoring of

the achievement of objectives by the park is carried out using both park-specific and nationally agreed performance and output indicators.

Communication and diffusion instruments: Lastly, the implementation of the institutional framework involves various instruments of communication and diffusion. The park label and the product label, as well as environmental education, are vital to the communication and diffusion of ideas, goods, and services. Communication is rendered a central task of the park management by the institutional framework that, for instance, require that the park must be supported by the resident population.

This diverse range of instruments and their interactions are crucial to the Swiss park model. An important aspect of this, however, is that some key instruments were already in existence before the park projects. These include the nature and landscape protection orders with their strong legal basis, and also the relatively well-accepted instrument of financial compensation for activities that benefit the public. The well-established spatial planning instruments also form an important foundation and are of use in coordinating the various sectoral interests when setting up the parks. This basis has allowed other instruments such as financial incentives from the confederation, the park label, and the product label to develop an optimal impact.

Here the interaction **of two different incentive systems** is of importance. **Financial incentives** from 'above' are linked to diverse conditions from 'below', such as independent local initiatives, the creation of a regional authority, viable park management, and the participation of local actors. The authority as representative organization of the local actors itself decides how it intends to meet the conditions.

The advantage of the strong grassroots democracy of this model is that the local population cannot be forced to accept a park. A disadvantage is that the direct-democracy approach can cause even promising park projects to fail, as has already repeatedly been the case.

The **labeling is a second important incentive** scheme. The **park label** allows the regions and municipalities to raise their profiles and thereby to receive support from other regional actors such as tourism associations and marketing organizations and their individual members. The **product label** for goods and services can in turn motivate the producers and suppliers of goods and services to create and market new products. This has the potential to address and motivate many local actors, encouraging them to become actively involved in achieving park objectives.

Conclusion

Overall it can be assumed that the instruments included in the institutional framework require, and – at the same time –, strongly promote *collaborative regional governance*. The incentive systems represent significant elements of the Swiss model.

However, it is only the linking of the incentives with other instruments that enables the promotion of *collaborative regional governance*. An important general finding is that the interaction of various instruments and their elaborate coordination is necessary for the promotion of *collaborative regional governance*. Existing instruments such as nature and landscape conservation areas anchored in legal framework and spatial planning continue to be of fundamental importance, but are no longer adequate when used in isolation. They can, however, have a wide-reaching impact when combined with agreements, market-economy incentives, and instruments of service, communication, and diffusion.

In particular, the development of incentive systems at various levels can motivate actors on the local level to act in the interests of park objectives, and can promote bottom-up initiatives. They thus represent a promising approach in terms of *collaborative regional governance*.